

# PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

## COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

### RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

#### Dog Training and Trialing

##### *Desired Experiences and Site Selection Considerations*

This activity involves training dogs to perform various hunting-related tasks and then applying the training in competitions (trials) or during hunting. Training can include many different aspects such as acclimating dogs to the sounds of gunfire, responding to directional instructions, teaching them how to find, point, flush, and then retrieve game animals, and to follow a scent trail. Dog training is a critical component of successful and safe hunting and the department seeks to provide opportunities for training throughout the state. Currently there are over 50 designated dog training locations on department properties.

Preferred settings for training are conditions that mimic hunting conditions. Generally, this includes open areas with grasses and forbs of varying heights that allow the trainer and dog to see each other. Since training involves considerable communication between trainer and dog, areas with few distractions are preferred. As a result, training grounds are somewhat self-regulating in terms of numbers of users at any given time. If a trainer arrives at a designated training ground and several others are already working dogs at the site, most trainers will find a different location or return at a later time. Training areas that are 40 to 200 acres are desirable.

Dog trials are competitive events hosted by clubs where dogs are formally evaluated by judges on a range of abilities. Trials typically occur over a weekend and involve dozens of dogs performing over established routes; as a result, trails require considerably more land than a general training ground. Preferred settings are large areas (~1,000 acres) away from population centers with grassland, savanna, or wetland habitats and mostly flat terrain. For most pointing-dog events, judges, marshals, and trainers (and in some cases spectators) ride on horses to identify “points” as they occur.

On department lands, dog trials are only allowed on Class I dog trailing grounds or by special use permit. Ideally, locations have trails (4-8' cleared corridor, native surface), a large mowed grassy area to park trailers and keep horses, drinking water and toilets (portable is fine), and a shelter with walls in case of bad weather.

Because a lack of distractions is important for both dog training and trial events, people pursuing other activities in the area can present problems. Most often, this conflict arises because people inadvertently find themselves in an area being used.

##### *Notable Differences in Participation or Opportunities Across the State*

Dog training takes place throughout the state. Wisconsin currently has 59 public dog training areas and many dog trialing events, although the statistics of visitation to the areas or participation in these events are not available.

Participation in dog trials is highest in the northwest (probably because of proximity to the Twin Cities) and south-central and southeast parts of the state (where most of the Class I grounds are located), moderate in the central,



north-central, and western parts of the state, and lowest in the northeast. Over half of participation in dog trials takes place an hour or more away from participants' homes.

### ***Notable Times of the Year of High or Low Participation***

Dog training occurs mostly from early spring to the opening of various hunting seasons in the fall. Most of the department's Class II dog training grounds are closed during the spring nesting season (April 15 to July 31).

Participation in dog trials is highest in spring and fall and moderate in summer and winter. It is not desirable to run dogs or horses during the heat of summer or cold of winter. Property managers limit the time of year that dog trials occur to accommodate nesting birds or other environmental concerns.

### ***Participation***

Participation rates and frequencies of dog training and trialing were not evaluated in the 2016 survey of Wisconsin residents conducted for the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The dates that are available on department properties for dog trials are nearly always completely booked and demand to host events is generally considered to exceed the existing opportunities. One of the most popular Class I dog training and trialing sites, Pine Island Wildlife Area, has increasingly been flooded due to some changes in hydrology associated with nearby wetland restoration. With this site less able to host events, demand has shifted to other grounds that are already heavily used.

